

From Gwangju to Brixton: The Impossible Translation of Han Kang's *Human Acts*

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ABSTRACT This article theorizes the relationship between trauma and translation through a close reading of Han Kang's *Human Acts* (2016) and its complex narrating of the Gwangju Democratization Movement of 1980. I engage with the novel through scholarship on state-sanctioned violence, the politics of memory and Korean and Black literary and cultural studies. I do this to consider how the massacre of Gwangju's residents by their own government is made possible by earlier histories of occupation and imperial violence in the Korean peninsula. I then turn to the Korean edition of the novel to address what emerges outside of the English translation. Here, I rely on my own language skills to read, translate and direct attention to what is lost in Deborah Smith's published translation of Han's novel. Specifically, I argue that Smith's version of *Human Acts* actively works against Han's subversive articulation of the elusiveness of subjectivity, the rendering of the world vis-à-vis violence, the possibilities afforded by opacity and the dilemma of what it means to write about "one's own" historical trauma. In an attempt to reflect critically on what it might mean to live in the ongoing ripples of such traumas, I offer a text that blurs autobiography, travel writing, Black Studies, and literary analysis, crafting something that may be situated under the aegis of cultural studies and alongside what Gloria Anzaldúa names an autohistoria-teoría and what Crystal Baik calls a diasporic memory work.

KEYWORDS Black studies, Gwangju Democratization Movement, Han Kang (author), Human Acts (novel), Korean studies, literary studies

"Defiled space never goes away. Its reoccurrence negates time as distance"

—Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*¹

In an interview with the Scots Makar Jackie Kay, Petra Tournay-Theodotou asks "what prompted [her] decision to publish [her] life story—in particular, the delicate story of tracing [her] birth parents—in prose form as a full-fledged autobiography."² While much of Kay's prolific output is informed by her embodied knowledges as a Black Scottish lesbian, *Red Dust Road* (2011)—the "full-fledged autobiography" in question—is perhaps her first work of prose that reads as having a stake in the intimate veracity of her life. Kay replies, "that was a surprise for me; my life turned into a story that was happening to me and I felt that in order to process that story I'd have to write about it as a life story."³ Both Tournay-Theodotou's question and Kay's answer speak to the assumptions readers hold around the autobiographical genre in contrast to fiction: that the former is somehow truer than the latter, closer to the skin. It is as though, as Elizabeth Nunez writes,

the contrivances of the art of fiction allow [the writer] distance from [her] personal experiences. It is the necessary aesthetic distance the writer needs in order to transform the ordinary, the mundane, into a work of art, offering at the same time cover for the writer, the veil of illusion behind which she can safely hide herself from the glare of the public eye, and—this is more personal—from the glare of perhaps disturbing introspection.⁴

For Nunez, choosing to write fiction has to do with the “necessary aesthetic distance” that is unafforded when writing autobiography. Kay’s explanation echoes in contrasting fashion, as she admits that part of the reason she writes *Red Dust Road* is “in order to process” what it meant to search for her Nigerian birthfather. At the same time, both Nunez and Kay suggest—it is a “veil of *illusion*,” a “*life story*” (italics mine)—that the separation between fiction and autobiography is a construction.

Utilizing these affordances of “necessary aesthetic distance” from “personal experiences” becomes immeasurably more complicated when we take into consideration the entanglements of the personal and structural. In Crystal Baik’s *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique*, she proposes a framework of “reencounters,” a concept which “captures how diasporic memory works catalyze moments of return and remembering that denaturalize naturalized temporalities, solidified presumptions, and historical knowledges.”⁵ In thinking through and with a selection of diasporic memory works by those displaced by the Korean War and the resulting expansion of South Korean and United States militant and neoliberal state structures, Baik tracks the *longue durée* of this unended violence. In doing so, she reads how the cultural creators in question turn to and produce aesthetic mediations to challenge the United States’ initial and ongoing political interference in the Korean peninsula; too, they use these spaces and forms to question how they themselves are constructed as potentially undesirable Korean subjects in the world.⁶

I bring together two seemingly disparate conversations—one on the tensions between autobiography and fiction within Black literary traditions and the other on unsettling widely held narratives of the United States as savior figure in the Korean War—because their generative intersection is where my article begins: what does it mean to attempt to turn away from “the glare of perhaps disturbing introspection” because to face it, to face oneself, is tantamount to forcing confrontations with structural violences writ large? To bringing to the foreground how one carries within sedimentations of undead histories never laid to rest? Both Black and Korean (and Korean American) literary and aesthetic traditions have long grappled with this unease, and, as Dana A. Williams argues, if “the question of genre in the African American literary tradition is as old as the tradition itself,”⁷ this is in part because Kay and Nunez, along with numerous others working within Black literary and aesthetic traditions, destabilize form and genre to have us think differently about the supposedly easy binaries of past and present, fiction and truth, aesthetic and political, personal and structural.⁸ Similarly, Baik’s objects of analysis are “multisensorial multimedia projects that crystallize through dissolving lines, cacophonous sounds, and divergent temporalities” to formulate alternative readings of South Korea’s achievements and the United States’ assistance post-1953.⁹ To be trained in these traditions, produced through these histories and living in their afterlives is to grasp that, as Edward Said argues, “no one has ever devised a method of detaching the scholar the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society.”¹⁰ Or, to form it as a slightly different question, “how much distance can there be between the pen

and the hand that holds it?"¹¹ The separation of genres, between what was and what is, is wielded as a move that insists on the compartmentalization of submerged knowledges into more quantifiable measures so as to determine what merits serious consideration. It is precisely this that I wish to argue against.

It is in this mode of thinking that I offer what follows—a kind of diasporic memory work, a kind of autohistoria-teoría, "a personal essay that theorizes," on Han Kang's *Human Acts* (2016), which takes as its point of origin the Gwangju Democratization Movement (광주 민주화 운동) of 1980.¹² As I discuss later in this article, my initial attempts at analyzing Han's novel were thwarted precisely because the form of writing in which I am most practiced made it nigh impossible for me to address the crosscurrents of how the *when* and *where* of reading this book deeply informed my initial reading. This was because the form of writing in which I am most practiced, in many ways, is still "fixing a constellation of ideas for a time at least, a fixing which no doubt will be replaced in another month or so by somebody else's competing theory."¹³ What I wanted to do instead was critically engage with how "my life turned into a story that was happening to me." This is particularly important as Han explicitly links the Gwangju Democratization Movement to the 1953 partition of Korea, a result of the Korean War which has produced and shaped my understanding of my family history. Because of the trauma of familial lines being split and disappearing into the ether of United States' interference and South Korean nationalism, the histories that I wish to have access to have been foreclosed to me; instead, what I am offered are official narratives that quite often position South Korea as a neoliberal model of success and the North as a hermit kingdom of terrorism at worst, and, at best, the butt of late night talk show hosts' tired jokes about reductive backwardness. In other words, what follows is an attempt at answering, even temporarily, questions that are by no means unique to me: how does one write one's life story when it is interrupted by the story of partition and empire? What might it mean to write such a life story under the aegis of cultural studies? And, in the writing of such a life story, in such a processing, what emerge as residues of that interruption that are still here, that still dictate how one might tell a story, this story?

I.

August 27, 2016—it's my last day in Glasgow for the summer, and I've chosen to spend part of it in the Waterstones on Sauchiehall Street. I'm on the second floor, mentally rifling through the carry-on and backpack out of which I've been living for a month, figuring out what I can leave behind were I to purchase books for my train ride to London and the Black Cultural Archives the following morning. I always remember to pack lightly, but also forget to leave space for the reading material I will inevitably buy. In my cataloguing, however, nothing seems dispensable, and I reluctantly turn toward the stairs when I see it: a soft-matte, powdery-black cover, two legs surgically amputated at the calves and rendered hollow: *Human Acts*, by Han Kang.¹⁴ A quick check online tells me that it has yet to be published back home, so I take a copy to the cashier, who, after his initial hello, asks if I've read *The Vegetarian*. I have. I ask if he has. Aye. We talk about Han's 2016 Man Booker International Prize winner for a bit—"weird," "creepy," and "violent" the dominant adjectives in our conversation, his rolled r's distinct from my Bay Area-flattened ones—as we wait for my credit card to clear. Transactions like these have become much easier with the United States finally catching up with chip technology, but he still needs me to sign for

my purchase. Something in my drawled scribble, in that exaggerated Y, is meant to prove that I am who I say I am.

II.

The train leaves from Glasgow Central Station and takes about five-and-a-half hours to reach Victoria Station, and I read *Human Acts* in one sitting across the border in the ostensible quiet car where a chatterbox family gives lie to its naming. The novel is a multi-voiced, multilayered text that details both the Gwangju Democratization Movement and the aftermath of the government-sanctioned massacre, the febrile and alienating stretch of trauma that rolls and roils without end. The uprising takes place May 18–28, 1980 in Gwangju, a city in southwest Korea, where university students and citizens in due course militantly protested the martial law government of Chun Doo Hwan, who had come to power after the assassination of then-president Park Chung Hee and a military coup on December 12, 1979.¹⁵ The event is one that I am not taught by my parents or my teachers during my years attending Korean language and culture classes on the weekends, a gift that felt like a burden, no doubt an experience shared by numerous 1.5 or second generation Korean Americans. I learned about the Japanese occupation of the peninsula, about Yu Gwan Sun, but not about the violences that occurred in the ostensibly democratic—and if not democratic, then at least comparatively “better than North Korea”—country of my birth.¹⁶ This omission is striking, given that during Chun’s presidency (1980–1988), “the Gwangju massacre remained a central issue for the democratization movements in Korea...Especially for student activists in South Korea in the 1980s, the issue of democratization was inseparable from unearthing the hidden truth concerning the Gwangju massacre.”¹⁷ In retrospect, the lapse in historical education must have been intentional. Grippled by the fear of losing us to assimilation, I cannot imagine that my Korean school teachers believed that a history of protestors being murdered by their own government would have been useful in inspiring identification, nostalgic or imaginary; Yu, a martyred teenager who with her dying breath predicted the fall of the Japanese Empire, was a much more suitable role model for both my gendering and that of Korea as the motherland in need of protection and filial respect. In no way is this move of mobilizing “idealized images of women, reflected in cinematic narratives and images” in the “context of nation building projects”¹⁸ exclusive to Korea, but the rhetoric around its uniqueness—*our* uniqueness—is one that I was taught by said teachers in a move to disseminate a nationalist pride.¹⁹

I also remained ignorant of how “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.”²⁰ The ways in which the Japanese occupation made Korea ripe for the Korean War, the ways in which the Korean War made Korea open to an incessant United States’ military presence as a mark of gratitude and protection against the ever-promised threat of communism, the ways in which such gratitude and protection made possible camptowns, martial law and dictatorships; such are the overlapping hauntings of modern Korean history. In other words, as Caruth suggests and to borrow from Indigenous and Native Studies, the Gwangju Democratization Movement is less an event and more symptomatic of a structure of an ongoing repression of dissent beginning with Japanese occupation and continuing into United States’ presence and South Korea’s own dictatorships.²¹ Or, as Baik argues, it is critical to read “the Korean War’s calamities less as exceptional aftereffects

than as structuring conditions of contemporary life."²² Rather than solely focusing on the temporal duration of the event, *Human Acts* begins in 1980 and moves us through roughly 35 years to end in 2013, pausing to track the effects of torture and suppression as they register—physically, materially, psychologically, emotionally—on individuals in 1985, 1990, 2002, 2010, and 2013.

Unlike Caruth, however, Han refutes a situating of trauma solely in the purview of those who survive it; her second chapter is narrated by Jeong-dae, a middle school student who is friends with Dong-ho, the main character of the first chapter who spends his time working in a makeshift mortuary and whose murder that initially happens off-page drives the rest of the novel. Despite refusing to leave his post until he finds Jeong-dae, Dong-ho ultimately admits to himself—and the readers—that he has seen his friend die, shot by soldiers called in to police the city: "Bare feet—what had happened to his trainers?—seemed to be twitching...Lying in the hush of the room, you see Jeong-dae's face with your mind's eye. You see those pale blue tracksuit bottoms thrashing, and your breathing becomes constricted."²³ Dong-ho sees first his friend's bare feet, and it is only later that he is able to visualize Jeong-dae's face; in similar fashion to how his everyday life—routine and rational—has become jagged with the brutality that punctures the mundane so as to taint it, so too has Jeong-dae become piecemeal. This breaking apart is made literal in the subsequent chapter as Jeong-dae assumes the narrative voice, speaking to readers from his rotting body. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, "not even *the dead* will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious;" whereas for Benjamin, the warning is about the desecration of history and the memory of the dead, for Han the danger that the dead face is also quite literal.²⁴

Jeong-dae is but one of many that help make up a pyre of corpses, and Han moves uneasily from monstrous whole—"the tower of bodies was transformed into the corpse of some enormous, fantastical beast, its dozens of legs splayed out beneath it"²⁵—to dismembered fragments—"I stared at my unchanging face. My filthy hands were as still as ever. Over my fingernails, dyed a deep rust by watery blood, red ants were crawling, silent"²⁶—and back again—"that festering flesh now fused into a single mass, like the rotting carcass of some many-legged monster."²⁷ In the constant shifting between a whole that exceeds his individual body and the body parts that are literally disintegrating from rot and the weight of the bodies piled on top of him, I read Jeong-dae as epitomizing how an all-encompassing nationalist rhetoric wreaks havoc by disarticulating subjecthood and coupling it with his openness to subjection. As he lies with the other corpses, Han writes that Jeong-dae sees them, himself included, rendered as a "fantastical beast," as a "many-legged monster," stripped of any kind of identifying human marker; their only use now is to provide the fuel with which the military can hid their crime. The beast, the monster, is a mirror image of the government's brutal suppression, and Jeong-dae can only look upon the inert dead with a recognition that "as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject."²⁸ At the same time, he is unable to see himself as a whole; rather, what becomes visible is how he has been rent, torn apart not only by the bullet that kills him, but also literally as he darkens, rots, chars, his face apart from his hands apart from his fingernails. Here, Allen Feldman's theorizing of violence during the Troubles in Northern Ireland is useful; he writes, "the act of violence transposes the body whole into codified fragments: body parts or aspects which function as metonyms of the effaced body or other large totalities."²⁹ Jeong-dae as both part of a larger body—the decomposing stack of corpses piled high in the gym—and the breaking apart into that which symbolizes a beastly, monstrous pain that destroys worlds—is perhaps what lies at the heart of the Gwangju Democratization

Movement and my learning of it so late in life: what does one do, as Dong-ho questions, when “you sing the national anthem for people who’d been killed by soldiers? Why cover the coffin with the Taegukgi? As though it wasn’t the nation itself that had murdered them.”³⁰

I know I want to do something with *Human Acts*, but I’m not sure what it is. As with other texts I have encountered that look steadily back at me, my instinctive reaction is to write about it, but Han meets and adroitly sidesteps this desire. “I suppose you thought you were helping me?”, a political prisoner asks a professor who has come to interview him about his participation in the Gwangju Democratization Movement and his subsequent torture at the hands of the Korean government. “But when it came to it, this dissertation you were planning to write, was it really going to benefit anyone other than yourself?”³¹ *I am not that*, I want to claim. *I am not a variant of Spivak’s benevolent intellectual*. Except maybe I am.³² “The glare of perhaps disturbing introspection” is bright. Later, as Han inserts herself into the narrative as a writer, as her fictionalized self encounters Dong-ho’s older brother, now an adult, he implores her, “Please, write your book so that no one will ever be able to desecrate my brother’s memory again.”³³ This, then, is the tension that *Human Acts* engenders in me: it is, as Benjamin states, about the desecration of the dead, about the fraught remembrance of the dead. But is it possible to separate the challenging of said desecration and my own potential professional and personal benefitting from such an action?

I think restlessly about this implied division over the next five days as I familiarize myself with Brixton, the site of the 1948 settling of the Windrush Generation and, in 1967, the location from which “[Obi] Egbuna and a group known as the Universal Coloured People’s Association (UCPA) launched Black Power.”³⁴ The restlessness lends itself to a constant walking through the neighborhood, beginning almost immediately after I unpack. And division, partition, is precisely the site of my ruminating, on what we now call North and South Korea with the gash of the DMZ in between,³⁵ the uneasy relationship of Scotland and England, the sites of contestation over independence and “Better Together.”³⁶ I walk to 165 Railton Road. To get to C.L.R. James’ old residence I must walk past Chaucer Road, Spenser Road, make a left on Shakespeare Road; Milton Road isn’t far behind. The names aren’t lost on me, and I’m cheered to see Fanon House on the way interrupting this imperial, “neutral” logic.³⁷ I later learn that Fanon House is part of an organization that serves Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) peoples living in the Lambeth area of London. I think about the violence of Fanon House nestled among these roads, the ways in which institutions nestle “diversity” within themselves as politically evacuated inclusivity. I think about the suture of kinship and fierce love.³⁸ It is August 28, 2016 when I arrive, and I think about the same day in 1955 and Money, Mississippi as I walk; he might have lived to see 75.³⁹ I think, too, of Ziggy Stardust, gone to Mars, the ruling planet of my sun sign, and as I walk during those five days I sometimes catch myself tunelessly humming, “oh leave me alone you know.” *Droogie*.⁴⁰

I return to the novel more than once during my time in Brixton, and slowly I recognize that it’s not that I want to do something with it, but that I want it to do something for me; similar to James Gronniosaw, perhaps, I want *Human Acts* to speak. Édouard Glissant points out that “Western thought has led us to believe that a work must always put itself constantly *at our disposal*...It can happen that the work is not written *for someone*, but to dismantle the complex mechanism of frustration and the infinite forms of oppression.”⁴¹ I want *Human Acts* to be at my disposal; more than anything, I want it to speak to me in a way that my parents will not, or cannot. They were of similar age to the university students protesting

the closing of Chonnam National University, which historians mark as the beginning of the uprising in Gwangju. When pressed, my *appa* tells me what by then I already knew: that martial law also included a curtailing of the free press, that other parts of Korea did not necessarily have immediate access to knowing what was happening in the South Jeolla province. My parents are sometimes like this, telling me details of their lives but rarely in historical context, and I am left to parse together some kind of larger meaning. I want to ask why they taught me Korean, insisted on my attending those Korean classes on Saturdays, if they are so unwilling to speak of a Korea that is concomitantly theirs and not. I never do, perhaps because their refusal to speak says more about my prerogative around asking, about my inability to ask but one question.

Initially my grievance seems to be mirrored in *Human Acts*; moments of abbreviated speech abound in the text. In one of its most compelling scenes, Eun-sook, who is first introduced as one of the handlers identifying and moving corpses in the first chapter alongside Dong-ho, re-emerges in 1985 as the editor of a play. Her chapter is sectioned into seven slaps, delivered "over and over in the exact same spot" by her inquisitor, so hard that "the capillaries laced over her right cheekbone burst, the blood trickling out through her torn skin."⁴² The location on her skin connects her to the site of trauma; every slap is how she recounts and remembers. This is her punishment for being seen meeting with a translator who has been deemed traitorous to President Chun and his cabinet. The chapter consists of her attempting to forget both the physical and psychological pain endured, coupled with her inability to forget Dong-ho and all his disappearance represents; forgetting is always wed to a persistent remembering. When she goes to pick up the manuscript of the play that she and the translator had been discussing from the censor's office in Seoul City Hall,

[h]er initial impression is that the pages have been burned. They've been thrown onto a fire and left to blacken, reduced to little more than a lump of coal... From around the fiftieth page onwards, perhaps because drawing a line had become too labour-intensive, entire pages have been blacked out, presumably using an ink roller. These saturated pages have left the manuscript bloated and distended, water-logged flotsam washed up on some beach.⁴³

She is left to wonder what might be recuperated, and I am taken back to the second chapter of the novel and Jeong-dae's musing on his own disintegration: "I looked on in silence as my face blackened and swelled, my features turned into festering ulcers, the contours that had defined me, that had given me clear edges, crumbled into ambiguity, leaving nothing that could be recognized as me."⁴⁴ The erasure of who Jeong-dae is, is cast in a similar language to the censoring of the manuscript: both are blackened, bloated, both are unrecognizable as who, or what, they originally were. But also, simultaneously, Jeong-dae thinks, "the bodies of ten people they'd just piled up seemed to be missing their heads. At first I thought they'd been decapitated; then I realised that, in fact, their faces had been covered in white paint, erased. I swiftly shrank back."⁴⁵ White, the traditional color of *handbok* worn as a sign of mourning.⁴⁶ What is it about white erasure that causes this horror? What is it about blankness that causes retreat? Jeong-dae recoils in disgust from the sight of his decomposition, but disgust and horror are not one and the same. White erasure and blankness feel analogous to the novel's quiet, its refusal to speak to readers like me, kept wanting in a diaspora rippling with histories of occupation, military and political interference, war.

Too, Han gestures to a palimpsestic presence in the blackened bodies, in the blackened pages. Inasmuch that Jeong-dae's spirit is present to witness the burning of his fleshly remains—and the wholesale murder of Dong-ho and other middle school children later in the novel—Eun-sook is startled into spilling her coffee on the desk back at the office: "Mr Seo's nimble fingers snatch the proof up again. To save it from getting stained. As though it still contains something. As though everything in it hasn't been nullified."⁴⁷ While Eun-sook dismisses the senior editor's action as nonsensical, I cannot help but think of Toni Morrison's reading of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*; she quotes, "[t]his visible [colored] world seems formed in love, the invisible [white] spheres were formed in fright" and continues that *Moby Dick* "question[s] the very notion of white progress, the very idea of racial superiority, of whiteness as privileged place in the evolutionary ladder of humankind" and "meditate[s] on the fraudulent, self-destroying philosophy of that superiority."⁴⁸ Morrison's argument is that Melville is aware that Blackness bestows gifts of survival and abundance, whereas the ideology of whiteness promises nothing more than death. In *Human Acts*: from a thing imagined as bloated or darkened emerges the very thing that the military and censors cannot actually eradicate.

The play is staged, and Eun-sook attends. She spots the plainclothes police in the audience and fears for the playwright and translator. Despite their presence, the woman on the stage begins to speak. "Or so it seems. In actual fact, she cannot be said to say anything at all. Her lips move, but no sound comes out. Yet Eun-sook knows exactly what she is saying."⁴⁹ As the editor, she recognizes the lines because she is the one who has typed up the manuscript: "[a]fter you died I could not hold a funeral, / And so my life became a funeral."⁵⁰ Immediately after, an actor walks up the aisle toward the stage.

His lips gupper like a fish on dry land. Again, Eun-sook can read what those lips are saying, though speech is an uncertain name for the high-pitched sound shrieking out from between them... "Oh, return to me. / Oh, return to me when I call your name. / Do not delay any longer. Return to me now."⁵¹

It is one of those serendipitous moments that always seem to befall me when I am overseas; the book I need is on hand. I pull out my copy of Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* from my backpack and find it, highlighted years ago: "noise is essential to speech. Din is Discourse."⁵² In Glissant's formidable conceptualization, he is describing a world system, an element of the peculiar institution that I am trained to research and teach back in California. The Gwangju Democratization Movement has a different timeline, a different context. I rebuke myself. I tell myself that to rely solely on Glissant is irresponsible scholarship even as I sit on the bed with his text open to the right of me, one edge held down by my thigh, the other by my overheating laptop, Han's novel face down on my left. I tell myself I will conduct more research once I am back at my own desk. Or perhaps it is not that I will need to rely on his work necessarily, as much as it is that he might show me a way in that is also a way out. My tea cools as I wait, the full-fat milk turning slightly scummy on the surface. I don't mind drinking cold tea. *You barbarian*, my ex used to say, bringing me a fresh cup. Yes, I would quip. *Were you waiting for me?* He never understood, which maybe was a sign.

Eventually, I have it. What Glissant provides for me is this: more than merely illuminating a way to think about the mute woman on stage, the shrieking man heading toward her, he pinpoints the source of my confusion. In his formulation, he writes of the Caribbean man: "no one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout. It was taken to be nothing but the call of a wild animal. This is how the dispossessed man

organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise."⁵³ Creole, as a language system saturated with the violence of slavery and anti-Blackness, registers initially as din, as discord. Subversively, however, if the master needed to make himself understandable, that also suggests that the slave, the Caribbean man, was also illegible. His speech, his cry, registered solely as "the call of a wild animal." Neither Glissant nor I are arguing that this is in any way wholly liberatory, but it does suggest unintelligibility as a site of what Ralph Ellison calls "the lower frequencies."⁵⁴ In Han's formulation, there are two people—the woman, the man. She is mute, but he both shrieks unintelligibly—"speech is an uncertain name"—and vocalizes the imploring song as demand.⁵⁵ How is this possible? Is the shriek a song? Does Han also divorce speech from legibility? Eun-sook and the others in the audience peer carefully, "gaze with great concentration on the actor's lips."⁵⁶ And then my second realization, which is so obvious that I'm embarrassed to admit that it did not cross my mind even once during those five days. When my mind alights on this error it immediately moves to refuse it, similar to how my students avoid meeting my eyes when I tell them they're looking too hard for an answer to a question I've posed. *It's right there in front of you*, I tell them sometimes, my tone in jest but my message not. It's true for me, too. It's right there in front of me.

I'm reading the novel in English.

III.

I return to California in September, leaving behind the country "where I am happiest and where I am most alone."⁵⁷ I procure a copy of *Human Acts* in the original Korean. And even before I begin reading the novel, the first shift.⁵⁸ *Human Acts*, in English. *The Boy is Coming*, or *The Boy is Arriving*—"소년이 온다"—in Korean. Deborah Smith, Han's translator, admits to changing the English title because the literal translation is "awkward enough even without the euphemistic implications," and settles on *Human Acts*, "a phrase which to [her] embodied the neutrality, disorienting and even terrifying, inherent in the fact that these can be both tender and violent, brutal and sublime, committed by the same individuals."⁵⁹ To say that Han's novel embodies neutrality in any shape or form is the logic of whiteness at work; the boy, who I read as Dong-ho, is caught in the never-ending act of arriving in the novel, his ultimate fate not known to all of the other characters. Jeong-dae is the literal ghost in the novel, but Dong-ho is the ghost in Avery Gordon's formulation, "not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure" where "investigating can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life," the haunting accompaniment to the material changes occurring in Korea post-1980 and in the lives of the characters.⁶⁰ This dense site is also linked to how I read Han's original title as demonstrating that the "defiled space" of Gwangju "never goes away. Its reoccurrence negates time as distance."⁶¹ Eun-sook, in June 1980, mere days after the uprising, calls the Provincial Office's Public Enquiry Department to report that the fountain in Gwangju is working perfectly: "how can it have started operating again already? It's been dry ever since the uprising began and now it's back on again, as though everything's back to normal."⁶² After weeks of calling, a "sympathetic yet sadly resigned" woman answers and tells her, "*There's nothing we can do about the fountain. You sound like you're still in school, no? It's best you forget, then.*"⁶³ For Eun-sook, there is no forgetting; Dong-ho and Gwangju reoccur, linear time is removed, and, as Feldman argues, "[t]he removal of time is the simulation of death."⁶⁴ But as Han demonstrates, as Benjamin demonstrates, death does not mean an end. Smith's claim that a literal translation of the title into English is

awkward due to its juvenile, sexual undertones serves to focus on the *human acts* of those involved in the Gwangju Democratization Movement, neutralizing the ideological formations of what constitutes *humanity*. In other words, this title suggests that Dong-ho and the dictatorship which murdered him are both human. While her refusal to ascribe to the novel a title that promotes a particular kind of grandstanding, singular narrative of resistance is commendable, Smith's erasure, the "white paint" of her title, does harm to Han's strategic deployment of Dong-ho as a metonymic of traumatic and traumatized time. "There is no way back to the world before the torture. No way back to the world before the massacre."⁶⁵ Closure is impossible, as is repair. What might be afforded us if we imagine repair as a verb—to repair in the name of justice, to argue for reparative justice, one which does not envision a "way back" as the aspirational goal? Or, in the forward momentum, *The Boy is Arriving*; he never arrives.

I flip idly through the novel, and then the second, more jarring shift: Smith has also mistranslated the chapter titles. Smith's reads as subjects caught in linear time: "The Boy. 1980," "The Boy's Friend. 1980," "The Editor. 1985," "The Prisoner. 1990," "The Factory Girl. 2002," "The Boy's Mother. 2010" and "The Writer. 2013." The corresponding titles in Han's version are, as best as I can translate, "Young Bird," "Black Breath," "Seven Cheeks," "Iron and Blood," "The Night's Pupil/Eye," "Toward Where the Flowers Bloom" and "The Snow-covered Lamp." What changes have been rendered here, from abstract to concrete, an affixing of the amorphous into the tangible? Smith's chapter titles name representation as the onus of the novel—individual figures who narrate each chapter are telling their own human stories. In Han's version, the chapter titles are imagistic, figurative—the focus is not on the respective narrator as she draws our attention elsewhere, perhaps to the din that conceals straightforward meaning. It is not that Han erases the absolute reality of the South Korean government's role in the massacre, but to turn again to Glissant, her chapter titles suggest what he has called in several locations "opacity:" "I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him."⁶⁶ Smith's translation project is, of course, about making the text accessible to those who are not fluent in reading Korean; at the same time, to translate the novel so carelessly into English, which is the literal language of the political and military force still present in Korea, one which is, as Han herself points out, linked to the massacre, is violent.⁶⁷ The move of removing all symbolic and figurative language from Han's chapter titles is less clarifying and more a forced elimination of the opacity that Glissant insists upon. Smith wants us to grasp and hold the very characters that Han indelibly writes as always on the move, dislocated in time and space because of their trauma, and unknowable precisely because of this, too. Bluntly stated, Smith, as a white British translator who was still relatively early in her learning of Korean as she undertook the project of translating *Human Acts*, whitewashes the political and temporal nuances of trauma in Han's novel, erasing the disorienting figurative language that Han uses to such provocative effect.

I spend time translating, paying careful attention to Eun-sook and her scene within the theatre. At times my mascara dots the pages of the novel, blurring the additional punctuation afforded by my pen. It is akin to one of Lydia Davis' most sparse and spare stories, "Collaboration With Fly"—"I put that word on the page, but he added the apostrophe."⁶⁸ The apostrophe supplied by the fly suggests a contraction—something has been removed—or a possessive—something, or someone, that belongs to something, or someone, else. I read 소년이 온다, in the original Korean, working as the former, restoring what Smith has removed, but not as the latter: this history does not necessary belong to

me, or perhaps to anyone reading it as *Human Acts*, or perhaps to anyone. To claim a trauma like the massacre in Gwangju as my own would be to ignore Caruth's claim that a history of trauma "can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence."⁶⁹ Or, as Morrison writes, "language can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable."⁷⁰ Smith's translation is at odds with this conceptualization of what language makes possible. Concurrently, I believe that "we need to continually re-evaluate and re-conceptualize what happened in May 1980 in terms of our *personal histories* as well as in terms of global and local political and economic circumstances."⁷¹ Too, in Davis' story, the fly works as a collaborator; it is what supplies the apostrophe, the "but" suggesting that this mark is the most significant thing on the page. My mascara dots, alongside my writing and re-writing within its pages, speak to a kind of collaboration with the novel. As Jennifer DeVere Brody suggests, "punctuation appears in/as writing as a means of inscribing bodily affect and presence imagined to be lost in translation. Punctuation's performances situate and suture the indivisible doubled relation captured in and by the phrase 'embodied text.'"⁷² In collaborating with the novel, in providing my own punctuation that undergirds my own bodily affect of weeping, I'm also attempting to think through what emerges when I read the novel, read myself, in this way.

One such moment, in Korean: Han writes, "Eun-sook reads the shape of his lips,"⁷³ but unlike the English translation, where the audience fixates on the "actor's lips,"⁷⁴ in the Korean, the audience gazes upon the "actors' lips."⁷⁵ It is but a simple shift, a fly moving slightly on the page, Roland Barthes' punctum, a "sting, speck, cut, little hole" that changes everything.⁷⁶ In the English translation, there is no confusion—the woman is simply called "the woman," and the man is identified through the gendered term "the actor." Thus it seems that while the woman is silently facing away from the audience, the audience attempts to read the simultaneous shriek and song coming from the actor's lips. In the Korean, although the woman still faces away from the audience, they focus on the "actors' lips," and, too, the actor does not shriek; instead, he emits a creaking noise. The multiplicity of actors' lips, a creak instead of a shriek.

I read this mistranslation in two ways. First, "actors' lips" suggest precisely what Smith's translation loses; rather than distinguishing the chapters into individual speaking voices, Han invokes what we might call a collective voice, one that is not singular in nature but nonetheless unified in purpose, that is to say, a dissemination of knowledges, embodied and otherwise, about the Gwangju Democratization Movement. At the same time, however, the impossibility of knowing, even though the play is staged a mere five years afterward: it is impossible, after all, for the audience to pay attention to multiple sets of lips, particularly when the woman on stage still has her back to them. I turn briefly to Anne Anlin Cheng's work on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*, where in discussing Cha's disjointed, mellifluous discordance as a meditation on colonialist trauma and violence, Cheng writes that "in *Dictee*, acts of *recollection* (in the sense of memory recall) are frequently indistinguishable from acts of *collection* (in the sense of gathering up)."⁷⁷ I propose a similar understanding of the impossibility of reading the woman's lips while her back is to the stage, while the audience insists that they are reading the actors' lips. The collection and recollection occur together; memory is faulty but can be gathered up. Or, put another way—the fountain in Gwangju cannot be working again so soon; the fountain in Gwangju is working again so soon. Both/and. This is but a minute example and occurrence in a novel that abounds with such perplexity and refusal when read in Han's first language.

Reading the novel in Korean is distressing, and I knew it would be. Part of the hurt, I think, is that I don't believe it will do the *something* that I desired and desire, that I don't believe it will speak to me in the way that my parents will not, or cannot: "pain without marks is like speech without writing, doomed to pass into oblivion."⁷⁸ I don't know how much I agree with this sentiment, but it finds me writing and deleting, the tea switched for Laphroaig, the Bowie switched for another we mourn that year: maybe he and I are both like our fathers, our mothers, too demanding and never satisfied. I tell my students and I tell myself that language is never enough, that we will never fully be able to say what we mean.⁷⁹ I look into their sometimes disappointed faces and tell them that this actually holds a radical potential for us as writers because it affirms that complete clarity does not have to be the goal. It might be, instead, opacity, a right to refusal.

Yet this is difficult for me to accept as I continue the slow, arduous process of reading the novel in the language that I knew first, the one that still sounds as excessive love and loss, as love and guilt. When a friend and I decide to propose a seminar for an academic conference, we settle on the theme of partition and I feel an unloosening in my chest.⁸⁰ Yes, partition—the lens through which I can examine the novel and build to a critique, situate the knowledges I've known and gleaned through the years spent in university classrooms and hotel event spaces: that the Korean War was a proxy war; that South Korean troops were sent to fight in the Vietnam War when the United States came to collect its debts, as "we have too much debt"⁸¹; that the United States backed more than one dictatorship in Korea (as it continues to do so elsewhere); that the partition between North and South would remain in place so long as the United States had both a political investment and military presence at the 38th parallel and below. I initially write the conference paper in a straightforward manner, but it remains stilted, beset by the kind of jargon that I usually avoid. In an effort to allocate Han her right to opacity, I veer too far away from her, making warp and weft of what occurred in the years of 1950–1953, the late spring of 1980 and removing myself entirely. Still, I adhere to my former advisor's admonishing that I should keep everything I write, as there is always something salvageable. What emerges is this: a kind of diasporic memory work, a kind of autohistoria-teoría. To situate myself as impersonal author, ever, is a fraudulent decision that reaffirms structures of knowledge production that are steeped in normative categorizations of intellectual work defined by whiteness. Instead, I have attempted to demonstrate why, returning to Kay, Nunez and Baik, processing the impossibility of linguistic and cultural translation in *Human Acts* had to be written as a kind of life story that refuses multiple partitions.

And so, the knowledge I've known and gleaned through the years spent at my mother's side, massaging her legs, swollen from unending shifts at the various businesses my parents operated and had to abandon: that my maternal grandmother nearly died when she was told that my uncle had perished in the Vietnam War; that she nearly died again when it turned out that he hadn't; that my paternal grandmother had been orphaned as she and her family fled from what we now call North Korea, her hand slipping from her older sister's protective grasp; that she never saw her family again; that my parents and grandparents would not speak of particular things, no matter how I phrased my question; that I could not ask my question. And yet, despite this and because of this, I still am unsure what it means that I have written about the novel, and written about it in this way, when the answers I look and wait for are still coming, are still and never arriving, in all of the languages to which I have access.

IV.

"What right do you have to demand that of me?"⁸²

Notes

1. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 67. [↗](#)
2. Jackie Kay and Petra Tournay-Theodotou, "Some Connection with the Place." *Transition: What is Africa to me now?* 113 (2014): 85 [↗](#)
3. *Ibid.* [↗](#)
4. Elizabeth Nunez, "Truth in Fiction, Untruths in Memoir." *Callaloo* 37.3 (2014): 501. [↗](#)
5. Crystal Baik, *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020), 6. [↗](#)
6. Baik argues that part of her work is examining how "U.S. militarized occupation generates its own seeds of demise, so to speak, by paradoxically producing *diasporic* excesses, or non-normative subjectivities and spaces deemed expendable to the U.S. and South Korean national agendas" (8). [↗](#)
7. Dana A. Williams, "Everybody's Protest Narrative: *Between the World and Me* and the Limits of Genre." *African American Review* 49.3 (2016): 179. [↗](#)
8. There are too many to name but here a few examples of new forms, genres, methodologies, fields that resist stagnant definitions in favor of porous possibilities: Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative; Audre Lorde's biomythography; Dionne Brand's longform poetics; The Combahee River Collective's unilaterally and collectively written manifesto; Stuart Hall's cultural studies; Hanif Abdurraqib's love letter-cum-investigative study. [↗](#)
9. Baik, *Reencounters*, 8. [↗](#)
10. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York City: Vintage Books, 1979), 10. [↗](#)
11. Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 30. [↗](#)
12. Gloria Anzaldúa, "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts" in *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 578. [↗](#)
13. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory." *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (1988): 68. [↗](#)
14. I choose the word "render" because I associate it with *making*, of *causing*, and the two amputated legs on the front cover are clearly made by their artist, and, given the content of Han's novel, we are asked to grapple with the cause, effect and affect of violence. But I'm also interested in how the word also means to *convert* flesh into something consumable (e.g. fat/lard)—as well as "rend," to tear, to cause emotional distress—for reasons that I address later in this article. [↗](#)
15. Han's novel points out the ways in which those living in Gwangju engaged in a militant defense of their city as a last resort; even these weapons were no match for the more sophisticated artillery of the Korean Armed Forces. [↗](#)
16. For more information, please see "Overlooked No More: Yu Gwan-Sun, a Korean Independence Activist Who Defied Japanese Rule" by Kang Inyoung, *The New York Times*, March 28, 2018. [↗](#)

17. Kim Dong-Choon, "The Long Road Toward Truth and Reconciliation: Unwavering Attempts to Achieve Justice in South Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2010): 537. [↗](#)
18. Ju Hui Judy Han and Jennifer Jihye Kim, "Introduction: Gender and Politics in Contemporary Korea," *The Journal of Korean Studies* (1979 –)19, no. 2 (2014): 249. [↗](#)
19. One specific location of emergence, most relevant to my work here and elsewhere, is in the scholarship on the entanglements between Black liberatory performances and movements in the United States and in England, Scotland, and Ireland. In *Kinship and Performance in the Black and Green Atlantic: Haptic Allegories*, for example, Kathleen M. Gough argues that "women appear as specters that double the movements of a social life determined by ethos (derivative of male circum-Atlantic travel), and as the spirit through which the pathos of social life is formulated (the allegorical figure who endows circum-Atlantic surrogacy with meaning)" *Kinship and Performance in the Black and Green Atlantic: Haptic Allegories* (Abingdon: Routledge: 2013), 9. [↗](#)
20. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4. [↗](#)
21. This language is borrowed from Patrick Wolfe's "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'A structure, not an event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5, no 1.(2016). As Kauanui rightfully points out, colonialism as a structure—that is to say, an ongoing world-making and world-destroying—is an analytic undertaken and expanded by scholars within Indigenous and Native Studies. [↗](#)
22. Baik, *Reencounters*, 15. [↗](#)
23. Han Kang, *Human Acts*, trans. Deborah Smith (London: Portobello Books, 2016), 37. [↗](#)
24. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255. [↗](#)
25. Han, *Human Acts*, 52. [↗](#)
26. Han, *Human Acts*, 55. [↗](#)
27. Han, *Human Acts*, 57–58. [↗](#)
28. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35. [↗](#)
29. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 69. [↗](#)
30. Han, *Human Acts*, 18. [↗](#)
31. Han, *Human Acts*, 114. [↗](#)
32. Moreover, I am not trained in Korean Studies, and the last time I worked on anything even remotely related was during my M.A. qualifying exams, when I created and read a list on Asian American literature, essentially a culling together of books I'd long loved and read into dog-eared, waterlogged scraps over the years. This did not, of course, stop students from insisting upon my "expertise" the first time I taught an Asian American literature course. [↗](#)
33. Han, *Human Acts*, 220. [↗](#)
34. Anne-Marie Angelo, "The Black Panthers in London, 1967 – 1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic." *Radical History Review* 103 (2009): 21. [↗](#)
35. I would like to say that I was canny, that I recognized immediately the unstable partition of Korea alongside the way Han partitions but leaves blurry the living and the dead, and how both carry the psychic wounds of this partition and complicate narratives of subjectivity. But I wasn't. My frustration was akin to something that many of us will have experienced: knowing that I couldn't stop thinking about this book, but not knowing why that was. [↗](#)
36. The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum resulted in a record high voter turnout of almost 84%, with roughly 45% of voters voting for independence. The ongoing question of Scottish

independence also will come to form part of the conversation surrounding Brexit in 2016 and onward. [↗](#)

37. The critique of the inherently imperial logic of literary canons is not new. For example, "Chris Baldick has pointed to the importance of the admission of English literature to the Civil Service examinations in the Victorian period: armed with this conveniently packaged version of their own cultural treasures, the servants of British imperialism could sally forth overseas secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples." Terry Eagleton, *What is Literature?*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 25. [↗](#)
38. I am using here Bhanu Kapil's invocation of the term in *Incubation: A Space for Monsters*, as not only a bringing together but an insistence on the interstitial, on the always in flight nature of togetherness. In other words, I use "suture" here to decry permanence as the only measure of community and kinship; such an insistence I draw from my training in Black Studies. For critical examples of such theorizing, please see Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003), and most recently, Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (2019). [↗](#)
39. In 2017, Carolyn Bryant admits to fabricating her accusations of Emmett Till threatening her, accusations which directly led to his torture, lynching and murder. For more information, please see "Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims Were False" by Richard Pérez-Peña, *The New York Times*, January 27, 2017. [↗](#)
40. "Droogie" invokes two texts: the first is David Bowie's "Suffragette City," from his 1972 album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. The narrator of the song regretfully informs his friend that since he is now in a relationship with a sexually liberated woman, their friendship must be cut short. The second is Anthony Burgess' linguistically fraught *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), wherein Alex and his friends—the "droogs" in question—celebrate and participate in "ultra-violence," which includes raping a woman in her own home. Brixton is still mourning the death of its former resident—the Bowie mural opposite the Brixton tube station is littered with bouquets of flowers when I go see it during one of my walks—and both the song and novel and their situating of women—and sometimes lack thereof—shade the sonic and geographic registers of reading *Human Acts*. [↗](#)
41. Édouard Glissant, "Cross-Cultural Poetics" in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 107. [↗](#)
42. Han, *Human Acts*, 69. [↗](#)
43. Han, *Human Acts*, 82–83. [↗](#)
44. Han, *Human Acts*, 63. [↗](#)
45. Han, *Human Acts*, 62. [↗](#)
46. It is no accident, I think, that Han's latest novel translated into English is literally titled *The White Book*, and explores, among other things, the death of her mother's first-born child. [↗](#)
47. Han, *Human Acts*, 87. [↗](#)
48. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, no. 1 (1989): 17–18. [↗](#)
49. Han, *Human Acts*, 105. [↗](#)
50. Han, *Human Acts*, 105. [↗](#)
51. Han, *Human Acts*, 106. I discuss translation further down in the article, but for the moment, I wish to point out that Deborah Smith's translation of this song is off the mark. A closer approximation reads, "Oh, return to me. / Oh, return to me now, as I am calling your name. / You cannot be any later, return now." It seems that Smith misses not only the letter, but the spirit, of the plea. [↗](#)

52. Glissant, "On Cross-Cultural Poetics," 123. [↗](#)
53. Glissant, "On Cross-Cultural Poetics," 124. [↗](#)
54. Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952), 581. [↗](#)
55. Han, *Human Acts*, 106. [↗](#)
56. Han, *Human Acts*, 106. [↗](#)
57. Neil Gaiman, "Introduction" in *Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015), xxiv. [↗](#)
58. The charge of mistranslation has been levied against Deborah Smith more than once; in the case of Han's *The Vegetarian*, for example, Charse Yun states that "for one thing, Smith amplifies Han's spare, quiet style and embellishes it with adverbs, superlatives and other emphatic word choices that are nowhere in the original. This doesn't just happen once or twice, but on virtually every other page. Taken together, it's clear that Smith took significant liberties with the text." For more information, please see "How the Bestseller 'The Vegetarian,' Translated from Han Kang's Original, Caused an Uproar in South Korea," by Charse Yun, *The Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 2017. Similar to Yun, I am less interested in a word-for-word translation, but rather am struck by the ways in which Smith's work loses the symbolic, the figurative, in favor of the literal. [↗](#)
59. Deborah Smith, "On Translating *Human Acts* by Han Kang." Asymptote. <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/han-kang-human-acts/> < <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/han-kang-human-acts/>> (accessed March 17, 2019). [↗](#)
60. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8. [↗](#)
61. Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 67. [↗](#)
62. Han, *Human Acts*, 74. [↗](#)
63. Han, *Human Acts*, 103. [↗](#)
64. Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 137. [↗](#)
65. Han, *Human Acts*, 181. [↗](#)
66. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 194. [↗](#)
67. As Donald N. Clark writes, "Since 1950, the South Korea-U.S. military marriage has had an additional institutional base. The joint defense of South Korea is under the coordinated command of an American four-star general. This commander has "operational control" over all forces in wartime and over front-line forces in peacetime. Consequently, when Gen. Chun Doo Hwan sent his army's 20th Division to crush the Kwangju (*sic.*) uprising, he first had to notify the American commander, Gen. John Wickham, that he was removing the division from Wickham's control. The American side insists that Wickham had no power to keep the division under his control and prevent this movement. However, Wickham's acknowledgment that he was notified is taken by many South Koreans to have constituted "approval" of Chun's use of massive military force against the demonstrators in Kwangju (*sic.*)."
For more information, please see "U.S. Role in Kwangju and Beyond," by Donald N. Clark, *The Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1996. [↗](#)
68. Lydia Davis, "Collaboration with Fly," in *Varieties of Disturbance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 8. [↗](#)
69. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 18. [↗](#)
70. Toni Morrison. Nobel Lecture. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Wed. 20 May 2020. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture> < <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture>> . [↗](#)

71. You-Me Park. "Working Women and the Ontology of the Collective Subject: (Post)Coloniality and the Representation of Female Subjectivities in Hyon Ki-yong's *Paramt'anum Som (Island in the Wind)*" in *Dangerous Women: Gender & Korean Nationalism*, eds. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), 204. Italics mine. [↗](#)
72. Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 7. [↗](#)
73. 한강, *소년이 온다* (파주: 창비, 2014), 100. [↗](#)
74. Han, *Human Acts*, 106. [↗](#)
75. 한, *소년이 온다*, 100. [↗](#)
76. Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27. [↗](#)
77. Anne Anlin Cheng, "History In/Against the Fragment: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha" in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 141. [↗](#)
78. Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 85. [↗](#)
79. I'm thinking here, too, of Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998), where a linguist realizes that we think sequentially because our language system is sequential; our language system is sequential because we think sequentially. When she encounters an alien life form she calls Heptapods, she soon learns that these beings think simultaneously and thus write simultaneously as well, making it so that they are able to see past and future at once. Chiang's short story asks us to consider the fallacy of expecting language to be in the service of providing linearity and clarity if those very things are occluded by the language structure itself. [↗](#)
80. Dr. Emma Stapely (University of California, Riverside) and I proposed and co-chaired a seminar, "Senses of Partition," for the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present Annual Conference in 2017, where I circulated an initial version of this paper to seminar participants. [↗](#)
81. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), 61. [↗](#)
82. Han, *Human Acts*, 139. [↗](#)

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